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## Can We Learn a Language Without Rules?

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# Can We Learn a Language Without Rules?

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### Introduction

If an individual were to have fallen into a deep sleep for 100 years, much like Rip van Winkle, and awakened to the world as it is today, the changes in modes of transportation, space travel, and computer technology would evoke a sense of awe. The one constant that may appear unaffected by time is a place called school. Here one could find students sitting in a classroom, at desks, in a row, listening to a teacher who poses questions to be answered by students. Certainly this is not always the case, there are exceptions, but generally it still holds true. The same can be said about how we teach foreign languages, more specifically, how we teach grammar in the language classroom. Typically we see grammar taught by introducing rules using the first language (L1) through repetitive drills and worksheets. Is this the most effective way to teach language structures?

Certainly grammar constitutes an integral part of language instruction and with the development of communicative language teaching and standards-based instruction, the question of how best to teach grammar in the classroom is still heavily debated. The purpose of this article is to summarize the prevailing perspectives and theories of grammar teaching, provide an update on empirical studies, and present effective strategies and examples of grammar tasks that promote grammatical competence and support the second language (L2) learning process that is in concert with research, theory, and best practices.

### **The Great Debate**

The majority of research on grammar teaching falls into two camps: learning with or through rules (cognitive, deductive, conscious, or tutored processes and learning), or learning without rules (associative or implicit learning). When there is an absence of rules, the learner must rely on data-driven processes supported by memory. This approach leads to the formation of memories that can be easily accessed, allowing for faster performance, but without knowledge that can be generalized in new instances (Ortega, 2009). Without explicit rules, learning is bottom-up (data driven and memory driven) and does not lead to knowledge of a systematic rule. With rules, learning occurs by drawing on focused attention and conceptually driven processes supported by conscious attention, resulting in generalization with awareness (Ortega, 2009).

Implicit language teaching, or learning without rules, involves exposure to information. One learns through examples, usage, and illustrations without direct instruction about the language structure. Explicit language teaching poses the question: why make the learners guess the rules? Present the rule through clear and straightforward explanations and practice the rule until the students “internalize” the concept.

### **What We Know from Research**

What does research reveal about the effectiveness of implicit versus explicit grammar teaching? Empirical research in this arena is summarized and presented chronologically in order to provide the reader with an overview of findings that have influenced the teaching of grammar over the last twenty years.

Green and Hecht (1992) found that German university students who studied English were able to produce clear explanations for 85% of their grammatical errors, but the question of how well students were able to produce language was not addressed. Herron and Tomasello (1992) compared a guided induction approach to a traditional deductive approach. Results indicated that the guided inductive approach was superior to the deductive approach for the teaching of certain grammatical structures for beginning language learners. The researchers stated that “students learned grammatical structures better when they were given immediate feedback than they did when they were given a variety of examples without feedback” (p. 716). Alanan’s experimental study (1995) presented three groups of language learners with different forms of language input: visual enhancement (implicit presentation), explicit rule presentation, and a combination of both. Visual enhancement had a facilitative effect on learners’ recall and use of the target language. Students who did not receive any explicit form-focused instruction committed frequent omissions and over-generalizations in language use. Students who received explicit language instruction made frequent use of first language transfer. The study concluded that “the overall effect of the explicit rule-based instruction was clearly beneficial” (p. 294) and supported Schmidt’s (1990) prediction that less salient target language features may benefit from focusing learners’ attention on form (i.e., explicit learning).

Norris and Ortega's (2000) meta-analysis of 49 studies related to explicit instruction revealed substantial gains in the learning of target structures that were sustainable over time. DeKeyser (2003) reviewed studies that focused on the implicit/explicit L2 contradiction, either in a laboratory context or in a classroom setting. Findings were overwhelmingly in favor of explicit learning. Klapper and Rees (2003) drew on data from a four-year-long longitudinal study involving 57 undergraduate learners of German exposed to "focus-on-form" (inductive, meaning based) and "focus-on-forms" (deductive, out of context) instruction. The study revealed that learners who received focus-on-forms instruction, supported by meaningful interaction with L2 sources, made significantly greater progress than focus-on-form learners, whose program involved less consistent attention to linguistic features and had a more meaning-led syllabus. Erlam (2003) examined deductive instruction, which included rule presentation, metalinguistic information, and inductive instruction focusing on form with no explicit grammar instruction. Students in the deductive group showed consistent gains in acquiring presented grammar material, unlike those in the inductive group.

Kanda and Beglar (2004) conducted an experimental study to examine communicative grammar lessons based on the following teaching principles: teach form-function relations, compare related forms, promote learner autonomy, and provide opportunities for generative use. The study revealed that meaning-focused activities, which force deeper processing in a second language, resulted in better acquisition of the verb forms. It was concluded that tasks, in which form and communication are relatively balanced, "may be optimal when learners have a basic understanding of a form and their primary task is to refine and sharpen that understanding" (p.116). It was found that when learners are provided with overly communicative activities it will most often result in the "continued use of partially acquired forms because they are communicatively effective" (p.116). Learners may benefit from differing combinations of communicative and form-focused activities at different points in their development since morpho-syntactic knowledge develops gradually over time. There is a value in explicitly teaching morpho-syntactic forms followed by using them communicatively in creative autonomous tasks. Macaro and Masterman (2006) investigated how explicit grammar instruction affects grammatical knowledge of, and writing in, the L2. Students who experienced explicit grammar instruction were tested three times over five months. The research found that explicit grammar instruction results in gains of some grammatical aspects, but does not lead to gains in accuracy in translation and free composition. Tode (2007) studied the durability of explicit and implicit grammar instruction among 89 Japanese high school students of English. They were divided into three groups: explicit instruction, implicit instruction, and no special instruction on the verb "to be." The explicit participants were required to identify the structure in the sentences and translate them. Implicit grammar instruction focused on pronouncing the sentences with "to be" and writing the sentences down from memory. The third group of students did not receive any explanation of the verb "to be" and instead received instruction on the modal auxiliary "can." The study revealed that the explicit group of students performed

better and the author concluded that implicit instruction through memorization of examples alone was not sufficient. Explicit instruction of the verb “to be” is effective in the short term, but any conclusions as to whether or not the effect is long term cannot be made. The research suggests that in order to produce a long term effect of explicit instruction, students must engage in frequent production of the verb and receive assistance in noticing the differences between various forms.

Takimoto (2008) studied the effects of grammar teaching approaches (i.e., deductive and inductive) on the acquisition of grammatical structures used to perform complex requests. Sixty Japanese ESL intermediate level students were randomly assigned to either deductive instruction, inductive instruction with problem-solving tasks, or inductive instruction with structured input tasks. The study revealed that “inductive instruction is effective when combined with problem-solving tasks or structured input tasks” (p. 381). The study suggests that language instructors use tasks that emphasize meaning and include communication situations related to real-world activities. Azmi Adel and Abu (2008) studied the effects of deductive and inductive approaches of teaching the active and passive voice in English. Ninety-three university students from Jordan were randomly divided into two groups and received either inductive or deductive instruction. Students who received deductive instruction performed significantly better on the use of active and passive voice than those who received inductive instruction. Students who were taught deductively were able to immediately apply the rules, whereas students who were taught inductively required additional time to complete the questions. The study explains the effectiveness of the deductive approach by the fact that these students received more immediate feedback from the teacher. The study concluded that when grammar is taught for the sake of grammar, the deductive approach is more helpful than the inductive approach.

These research studies indicate that, over time, a more balanced approach is being advocated. Researchers (Robinson, 1997; Ellis, 2005; Williams, 1999) have argued that future debates about grammar learning be reformulated in terms of the interaction between low level associative learning that draws on data-driven processes supported by memory (inductive) and high-level cognitive learning that draws on conceptually-driven processes supported by conscious attention (deductive). This type of balanced approach supports an interaction between both types of processing.

Another approach, processing instruction, includes initial exposure to explicit instruction as well as a combination of a series of input processing activities. These activities consist of tasks that encourage comprehension of the target structure rather than its production (Ellis, 1995, 2006; VanPatten, 1993, 2002). These activities help learners to create form-meaning connections through structured input (Lee & VanPatten, 1995). VanPatten (2002) argues that since the aim of this approach is “to assist the learner in making form-meaning connections during input processing, it is more appropriate to view it as a type of focus on form” (p. 764). Extensive research shows a favorable effect for processing instruction (Cadierno, 1995; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten & Oikennon, 1996).

### **Which Approach Should I Use? Things to Consider**

According to Ellis (2006) different variables influence a teacher's decision concerning which approach to grammar instruction to use, such as the specific structure of the target language grammar, or a learner's aptitude for grammatical analysis. Ellis (2006) states that "simple rules may best be taught deductively, while more complex rules may best be taught inductively" (p. 98). He further notes that learners who are skilled in grammatical analysis perform better when instruction is inductive, and those less skilled perform better when instruction is deductive. Ellis (2006) argues that "in order for grammar instruction to be effective, it needs to take into account how learners develop their interlanguages" (p. 86).

Ellis (2006) stresses the importance of emphasizing "the teaching of grammar in the early stages of L2 acquisition" (p. 90). He states that it is optimal to emphasize meaning-focused instruction initially and introduce grammar teaching later, when the learner has already begun to form his/her interlanguage that is, the individual linguistic system of a language learner that does not yet approximate that of a native speaker. Ellis (2006) supports the idea that grammar teaching needs to be designed in terms of both implicit and explicit approaches.

Nunan (1998) posits that the linear model of language acquisition, which implies that learners acquire one L2 item at a time "in a sequential step-by-step fashion" (p. 101), is not consistent with what is observed in the language acquisition process. He compares the linear model of language acquisition to building a wall, which appears as a result of "one linguistic brick at a time" (p. 101). Learners, though, do not acquire language in a step-by-step linear model. Various language elements interact and are affected by other elements. At different times during the learning process a learner's mastery of a specific grammar aspect either increases or decreases. Therefore, Nunan argues for an organic approach that compares foreign language learning to growing a garden, implying that learners do not learn one thing at a time, but numerous things simultaneously. Nunan (1998) argues that a linear traditional approach does not prepare learners to use their grammar knowledge communicatively. He suggests teaching grammar in a range of different authentic contexts and sees drilling only as a first step towards eventual mastery. The author emphasizes the importance of engaging students in tasks that allow for recycling of information to make transparent links between form, meaning, and use. Opportunities for structuring the language through inductive learning experiences and exploration of grammar in context should be provided along with diverse linguistic learning environments. A balance between explicit exercises and those that allow for exploring the use of grammar will be the most effective approach to teaching language grammar.

### **One at a Time, or All at Once?**

Ellis (2006) distinguishes between intensive and extensive grammar instruction. Should the teacher address a single grammatical feature per lesson or include multiple grammatical features? Extensive grammar teaching "refers to instruction concerning a whole range of structures within a short period of

time (e.g., a lesson) so that each structure receives only minimal attention in any one lesson” (p. 93). It allows students to attend to large numbers of grammatical structures and many of the structures are addressed repeatedly over a period of time. It is individualized and allows the teacher to make contextual analysis and respond to each learner’s errors. It does not attend to those structures that learners do not attempt to use and does not provide in-depth practice that some structures may require. Intensive grammar instruction “refers to instruction over a sustained period of time (i.e., a lesson, or a series of lessons) concerning a single grammatical structure or a pair of contrasted structures (e.g., English past continuous vs. past simple)” (p. 93).

Harley (1989) revealed that English learners of French did not manage to acquire the distinction between the preterite and imperfect past tenses after hours of exposure in an immersion program (i.e., extensive instruction), but were able to improve their accuracy in using these two tenses after intensive instruction. However, intensive instruction is time consuming and as such limits the number of structures that can be addressed. Spada and Lightbown (1999) note that intensive grammar instruction helps students to progress through the sequence of stages involved in the acquisition of the target structures even when learners are not ready to learn them. Intensive instruction helps learners to use structures they have already partially acquired (White, Spada, Lightbown, & Ranta, 1991).

### **Variables that Influence Grammar Teaching**

#### *Age*

Celce-Murcia (1991) identified several learner and instructional variables that may determine the most appropriate approach to grammar teaching. Age was identified as an important learner variable in helping teachers to decide the extent to which they should focus on form. Young children need little explicit grammar instruction, whereas adolescents benefit from some explicit focus on form. Language proficiency and learner background knowledge were identified as key learner variables. Beginning learners tend to approach grammar holistically or implicitly, whereas intermediate or advanced level learners need instruction focused on form. Zhonggang Gao (2001) states that adults “comprehend the rules of grammar with the knowledge from either their first language or... their worldly knowledge” (p. 332). By offering an explicit type of instruction to adults, a teacher compensates for the lack of target language intuition in comparison to young children. On the contrary, children acquire a new language when they are provided with a rich cultural and linguistic target environment and do not require explicit grammar instruction. Zhonggang Gao (2001) notes that grammar is an aid to effective communication and “can be taught in isolated situations or in real situational contexts” (p. 323). The author posits that there is no proven benefit for correcting a child’s grammar, while adults need a teacher’s guidance in order to acquire grammar rules.

*Educational Objective*

When students are preliterate with little formal education, it is not very productive to focus on form extensively, however literate and well-educated learners may become frustrated when they are not given an opportunity to learn language structures explicitly. Formal accuracy is of little value when the learner's goal is survival communication, but when "the learner wants to function as an academic... a high degree of formal accuracy is essential" (p. 464). Celce-Murcia (1991) argued that the need to focus on form changes according to the educational objective. When receptive skills such as listening or reading are to be taught, it is "irrelevant to emphasize grammar since these receptive skills require competence primarily in the areas of word recognition and semantic processing" (p. 464). Formal accuracy becomes important when the teacher is focusing on productive skills such as speaking and writing.

*Learner Styles*

Celce-Murcia (1991) identified two types of learners: analytic and holistic. Learners with an analytic style learn best by formulating and testing rules, whereas, holistic style learners learn best by "experiencing, gathering and restructuring... but doing little or no analysis" (p. 463). A learner's cognitive style should be taken into account while teaching grammar (Abraham, 1985). Abraham (1985) conducted a study with ESL students who were either field-dependent or field-independent learners. Field-dependent learners focus on the big picture, rather than its parts, while learning and processing information. Their perceptions are influenced by the environment and are affected by an instructor's interaction and communicative style. Field dependent learners prefer to work collaboratively. Field-independent learners tend to focus on the parts rather than the whole picture while processing information. Their perceptions are not influenced by the environment and they prefer to work independently, taking a more impersonal approach to learning. According to Abraham's study (1985) field-independent learners performed better when they were exposed to deductive instruction, while field-dependent learners performed better with an inductive approach.

Midford and Kirsher (2005) explored the relationship between learning styles and performance by older and young adults and how a combination of different conditions influenced explicit and implicit learning. It was found that young adults performed better overall than older adults, however the older adults were less disadvantaged when the grammatical material was complex. Both young and older adults used implicit learning when rules were unavailable, or difficult to discern, and explicit strategies when rules were available. Scheffler (2008) claims that adult learners acquire information best when they are engaged in problem-solving activities by being provided with explicit rules about the target language, and then having opportunities for automatizing those rules.

*Topic Familiarity and Textual Enhancements*

Lee (2007) studied the effects of textual enhancement and topic familiarity on reading comprehension and learning of the passive form. In a study targeting



Korean EFL high school students, textual enhancement resulted in better performance on form correction tasks and aided students in attending to the target grammar. Students who were presented with enhanced texts recalled significantly less than students who were given baseline texts. This may be due to the fact that students may be distracted by the visual elements while exposed to enhanced texts. The study suggested that topic familiarity facilitated learners' focus on meaning during comprehension, whereas textual enhancement might have been involved in both comprehension and acquisition components.

#### *Learner Choice*

Cullen (2008) identified elements of grammar that should be incorporated into the design of grammar production activities: learner choice, lexis to grammar, and comparing texts and noticing gaps. The author notes that learners "must have a degree of choice over the grammatical structures they use, and deploy them as effectively as they can to match specific contexts and meet specific communicative goals" (p. 223). Grammar learning, thus, should have a process, rather than product oriented approach. Lexis to grammar implies that learners use their grammar knowledge to express a range of meanings that "the words alone could not convey" (p. 224). Comparing texts and noticing gaps in grammar teaching implies that the learner needs to focus on grammatical forms that "arise from their communicative needs as a result of noticing gaps in their own use of grammar" (p. 224). Cullen's research concluded that the most effective strategy to adopt for grammar teaching is to balance the two approaches: process-oriented and product-oriented.

#### *Cultural and Cross-Cultural Experiences*

Chen (2008) investigated the preferences of Chinese EFL students and native English speakers concerning inductive and deductive approaches. It was found that as students' L2 levels increase, their preferences for inductive types of instruction decreases. The author suggests that the degree of preference for either inductive or deductive instruction corresponds with variation of cultural experience and cross-cultural awareness of students. Therefore, language learning, cross-cultural understanding, and social-cognitive development interact with each other throughout the entire learning process.

#### *Teacher Led versus Peer Learning*

Toth (2008) compared two types of task-based grammar instruction: whole-class teacher-led discourse versus small-group learner-led discourse. The study of beginning Spanish students revealed that teacher-coordinated interactions in the teacher-led discourse group yielded stronger learning outcomes. It was mentioned, though, that observed benefits of teacher-led discourse greatly depended on a variety of individual and contextual factors, such as instructor's ability to effectively manage classroom interactions and a positive class rapport.

These studies provide empirical evidence that support success in learning grammar and serve as excellent guidelines for the development and effective

integration of grammar in the language classroom. The following grammar activities are designed to illustrate the principles learned from the research and serve as exemplars of grammar activities that represent best practice.

**Grammar Activities for the Language Classroom**

Example 1: Visually Systematizing Grammar Rules (Inductive Approach).

<i>Er</i>	<i>geht</i>		<i>samstags</i>	<i>ins Kino</i>
<i>Er</i>	<i>spielt</i>		<i>am Montag</i>	<i>Tennis</i>
<i>Am Donnerstag</i>	<i>hat</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>Musikunterricht</i>	
<i>Dienstags</i>	<i>geht</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>zu seiner Oma</i>	

He goes to the movies on Saturdays.  
 He plays tennis on Monday.  
 On Thursday he has music lessons.  
 Tuesdays he goes to his grandmother.

Have students identify the subject by drawing a circle around the subject of each sentence. Students then draw a square around the verb in each sentence. Once students have completed this task, have them formulate a rule (in pairs) that they discover from these four sentences. This exercise makes grammar rules conscious by having students use symbols to identify grammar structures. Students are also put into the role of active learner and are engaged in making sense from structure, negotiating with a peer, and ultimately constructing a rule that they observed and created. This instills confidence in their abilities, provides ownership, and motivates students.

Example 2: Drill for Skill

Students are presented with a picture of a student examining his new dorm room making the following observations:

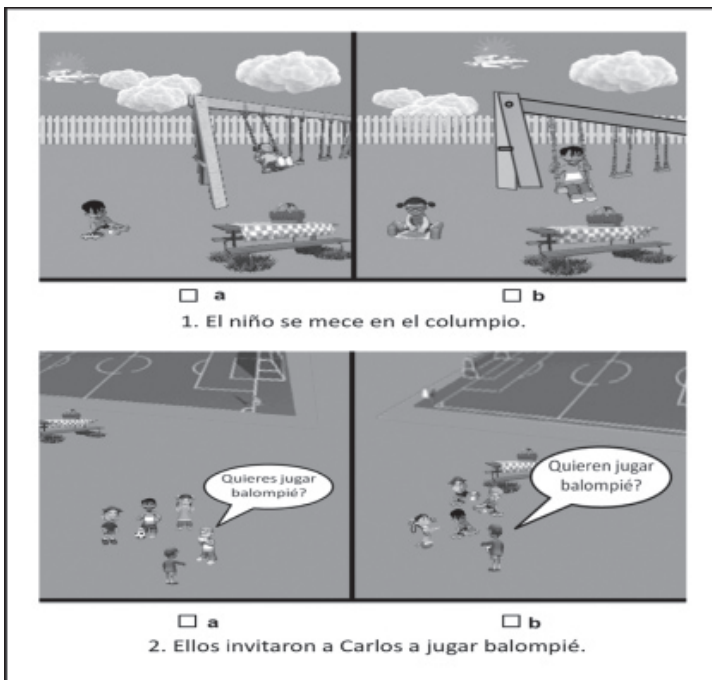
*Il y a une lampe, mais pas d'électricité.* (There is a lamp, but no electricity.)  
*Il y a un lavabo, mais pas d'eau chaude.* (There is a sink, but no hot water.)  
*Il y a une raquette, mais pas de balle.* (There is a racquet, but no ball.)

Students are asked to complete similar sentences about the room from another illustration. This forces students to attend to the structures in the previous model and write appropriate responses in another context. This type of activity engages learners in the learning process without the boredom of repetitive drills. They are learning structures in a new context that provides the necessary disequilibrium that promotes learning.

## Example 3: Sentence Interpretation Task

Teachers provide structured input that includes activities that are affective in nature, for example, activities that ask for an opinion, a personal response, or access the students' background knowledge and personal experiences. The teacher begins with a concrete statement tied to a picture to ascertain the truth value of a sentence. The students are asked which of the two sentences best describes the picture. The picture creates an immediate reference and there is only one right and wrong answer. These activities allow the teacher to discern if students focused on the actual grammatical meaning of the message before being led into affective learning activities.

**Figure 1.** Processing Instruction



The first picture in Figure 1 shows a girl sitting on a swing and the second picture shows a boy sitting on the swing. The statement "*El niño se mece en el columpio*" [The boy swings on the swing], forces the learner to attend to the gender of the child, in this case a male, thereby prompting the learner to attend to grammar while simultaneously focusing meaning. The second set of pictures depicts children near the soccer field. In the first picture Carlos' friends invite him to play soccer. In the second, Carlos invites his friends to play soccer. The statement "*Ellos invitaron a Carlos a jugar balompié*" [They invite Carlos to play soccer], forces the learner to focus on the plural form of the verb in order to

identify the picture that best represents the statement. The learner must focus on both the grammar and meaning as depicted in the visual representation.

Example 4: Input Processing Instruction

- |                    |             |
|--------------------|-------------|
| 1. a. Mr. Rogers   | Sarah Palin |
| b. agree           | disagree    |
| 2. a. Katie Couric | Jay Leno    |
| b. agree           | disagree    |

Students are presented with the statements above and listen to sentences that describe the individuals in these statements. Students access background knowledge about these individuals, thereby forming an opinion, and then must determine the correct response and indicate whether they agree or disagree with this statement.

1. *Es dinámico*
2. *Es cómica*

The student sees *dinámico* and immediately thinks the correct response must be Sarah Palin. However, upon closer examination of the grammatical structure, the only correct response must be Mr. Rogers based on the masculine “o” ending. The student identifies the correct response (Mr. Rogers) and then checks whether s/he agrees with the statement, thereby forcing an opinion on the part of the student. This involves deeper processing and evokes an emotional response that involves the learner in the learning process.

Example 5: Focus on Form

An example of a cognitive approach that directs learners’ attention to form can be found in the following:

- Carolina **purchased** a book in the bookstore.
- (a) last Monday
  - (b) tomorrow
  - (c) now

The student must attend to the morphological ending of the verb in order to determine that the response has to be something that happened in the past tense, thereby eliminating responses b and c. Again, the student is involved in focusing on grammar while attending to meaning and is actively engaged in the learning process.

Example 6: Complex Grammar Structures

For more complex grammar structures, implicit instruction can occur through a variety of learner centered activities. For example, students are presented with a dialogue and must fill in the correct form of *kennen* (to be acquainted with), *können* (to be able to, can), *wissen* (to have knowledge about). These three words in the German language are difficult to distinguish for language learners and thus may require a more explicit and structured approach.

1. Eric: Inka, \_\_\_\_\_ du wo die Bushaltestelle ist? Wir suchen sie seit 20 Minuten. Schau dort! Es ist der Oskar! \_\_\_\_\_ du ihn?
2. Inka: Ist er ein Freund von dir? Vielleicht \_\_\_\_\_ er wo die Haltestelle ist oder vielleicht hat er einen Stadtplan und \_\_\_\_\_ uns sagen wie wir dahin kommen.

Eric: Inka, do you know where the bus stop is? We have been looking for the last 20 minutes. Oh look! There is Oscar. Do you know him?

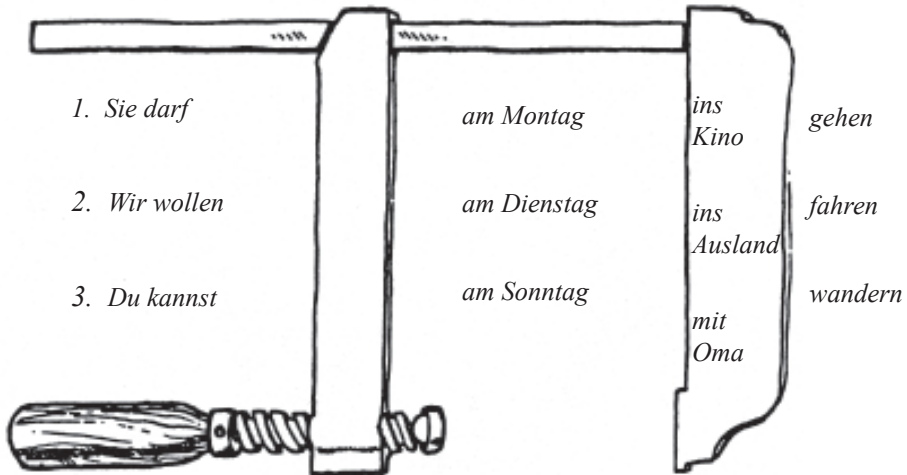
Inka: Is he a friend of yours? Maybe he knows where the bus stop is, or perhaps he has a city map and can tell us how to get there.

According to the research more complex grammar structures should be taught inductively, allowing the student to engage in the process of decoding meaning. Negotiating a response with a peer would enhance this activity and promote cognitive engagement.

Example 7: Visualization Strategies to Teach Grammatical Structures

Combining explicit instruction with visualization makes the structural relationship more concrete allowing the learner to physically and visually see the grammatical structures and how they function. For example, when teaching word order related to modals in German, one can use a picture of a clamp or a vise to concretely illustrate how the verbs function in the sentence.

**Figure 2.** Visualization Strategy to Teach Grammar (Source: Adapted from Neuner, 1983)



*Sie darf am Montag ins Kino gehen.* She may go to the movies on Monday.

*Wir wollen am Dienstag ins Ausland fahren.* We want to go out of the country on Tuesday.

*Du kannst Sonntag mit Oma fahren.* You can drive with grandma on Sunday.

#### Example 8: Information Gap Activity and Kinesthetic Learning

In order to facilitate students' learning of prepositions, a teacher may involve students in an information-gap activity. Working in pairs, Student A is given an envelope containing pictures of furniture and a piece of paper representing a room in the house. Student B is given a picture of a furnished room. Student B must describe to Student A where s/he must place the furniture. In German this demands the use of accusative prepositions. Once Student A has placed all the furniture in the room, he must describe to Student B where each piece of furniture is located. This requires the use of dative prepositions as the speaker is describing where each item is located. Together the students write a paragraph describing the room. The role of the teacher is to facilitate and provide feedback as needed. In addition the teacher listens actively as students negotiate the activities in order to provide formative assessment. The teacher can also make use of "teachable moments in grammar" by taking two to three minutes to focus on a grammatical structure that is particularly challenging to students based on her classroom observations.

#### Example 9: Cooperative Learning Tasks

Students are divided into four home groups and are asked to prepare a short presentation constructing a visual, or poster, about Shakira, a pop singer from Columbia. Students select a leader, a motivator, a time-keeper, and a recorder and each member of the group assumes responsibility for a certain part of the information: (a) Shakira's early years; (b) Shakira's professional rise to international stardom; (c) Shakira's music, awards, and future plans; and (d) Shakira's philanthropy and humanitarian efforts. Each member of the group joins an expert group (one student from each group who has selected this topic) where there are texts, videos, and resources designed to provide information on the topic. The members take notes on their findings in order to share this information with their home group. Students return to their home groups, share what they learned, and prepare a visual depicting the story of Shakira. They present their results to the entire class. This jig-saw activity immerses students in Spanish as they receive written L2 input via texts, videos, and other resources, and record a summary of the information learned in their expert groups in order to retell the information to their home group peers. All modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) are used and students are actively involved in the information gleaned from texts and resources while having to produce output by sharing findings with peers and presenting to the entire class. This activity also forces the use of past, present, and future tenses as students describe Shakira's childhood, rise to fame, and future plans.

#### Example 10: Mnemonic Devices

Games, songs, poems, and verses serve as excellent contexts for task-based communicative activities for teaching grammar. Saricoban and Metin (2000) mentioned that grammar games allow students to extensively practice and internalize grammar structures and absorb the language subconsciously. Poems, verses, and games include repetition, which allows the language to become rooted

in memory. Games are highly motivating and allow meaningful use of language in context. Ersoz (2000) argues that movement is an important element of grammar games as it activates student's mental capacities and stimulates neural networks, therefore promoting retention of information. TPR games may be used to teach some grammar items and structures such as prepositions. For example, the teacher can use both hands to illustrate prepositions, such as above, in front of, behind, and between as students imitate the movement.

A distinct advantage of games is the fact that all students are involved simultaneously and nobody is left out. A wealth of interactive grammar games, poems, and rhymes may be found at the following websites:

<http://www.spanishclassonline.com/games/hangman/affirmneg.htm>  
(hangman)

[http://www.spanish.cl/Grammar/Games/Articulos\\_Definidos\\_Indefinidos.htm](http://www.spanish.cl/Grammar/Games/Articulos_Definidos_Indefinidos.htm) (series of grammar activities)

<http://faculty.buffalostate.edu/beaverjf/internet/grammar.htm> (interactive grammar games)

<http://www.kimskorner4teachertalk.com/grammar/menu.html> (ideas and activities for teaching grammar)

[http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/subject/to\\_teach.phtml](http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/subject/to_teach.phtml) (variety of grammar tasks and ideas)

#### Example 11: Question Words

To promote the mastery of questions words, the teacher places an index card folded in half on six desks; each card contains one of the following question words: Who? What? Why? When? Where? How? The teacher sets the timer for five minutes and teams of four students sit at each table. The teacher provides a topic and the groups have five minutes to come up with as many questions as possible related to the topic. When the timer rings, the groups move to the next table. The winner is the group with the most correct responses. No books or dictionaries may be used. This allows for negotiation among the learners (peer learning), focuses on one grammar structure, and is in the form of a motivating game combining competition with collaboration. A variety of grammar points may be substituted for the question words.

#### Example 12: Storytelling using Props and Visuals

When teaching either/or prepositions in German, a picture of a room containing furniture and a hole in a wall, where a mouse is living, is distributed to students. The teacher tells the following story in the L2 as students listen to the narrative. The teacher elicits oral responses that require students to demonstrate understanding of form while attending to meaning. The focus here is on the difference between *wo* (location, where) and *wohin* (to where, movement).

*Die Maus wohnt in der Wand im Wohnzimmer. Sie hat Hunger und sieht ein Stück Käse auf dem Tisch im Wohnzimmer. Sie hat einen Bärenhunger und will den Käse essen ABER es gibt eine große, gemeine*

*Katze im Haus und die möchte die Maus gerne fressen. Die Maus geht sehr langsam in \_\_\_\_\_ Zimmer, springt auf \_\_\_\_\_ Stuhl, dann auf d\_\_\_\_\_ Tisch und beginnt den Käse zu essen. Plötzlich sieht die Katze die Maus und springt auf d\_\_\_\_\_ Stuhl, dann auf d\_\_\_\_\_ Tisch und will die Maus fressen. Die Maus erschreckt, springt auf d\_\_\_\_\_ Fußboden und rennt in d\_\_\_\_\_ Loch zurück. In dem Loch in d\_\_\_\_\_ Wand atmet sie tief ein und sagt laut: "Ich bin wieder in mein\_\_\_\_\_ gemütlichen Haus." Aber in ein paar Stunden hat sie wieder Hunger, schleicht in d\_\_\_\_\_ Zimmer und springt auf d\_\_\_\_\_ Tisch und frisst ein grosses Stück Käse. Plötzlich sieht sie die Katze, rennt davon, aber leider ist die Katze schneller und fängt die Maus. Wo ist die Maus? In d\_\_\_\_\_ Katze! Das Ende.*

The mouse lives in the wall in the living room. She is hungry and sees a piece of cheese on the table in the living room. She is as hungry as a bear and wants to eat the cheese BUT a large, mean cat lives in this house and would love to eat the mouse. The mouse slowly goes into the room, jumps on the chair, then on the table, and begins to eat the cheese. Suddenly, the mouse sees the cat and jumps on the chair, then on the table and wants to eat the mouse. The mouse is shocked, jumps on the floor and runs back into the hole. Once in the hole, the mouse takes a deep breath and says loudly "I am back in my comfortable house." But in a few hours she is hungry again, she sneaks into the room, jumps on the table and eats a big piece of cheese. Suddenly she sees the cat, runs away, but unfortunately the cat is faster and catches the mouse. Where is the mouse? In the cat. The end.

## Conclusion

There are many factors to consider when deciding how to teach grammar in the language classroom such as age, learner styles, educational objectives, cultural background, topic familiarity, and visual enhancements. Researchers have provided valuable direction for how and when to maximize student achievement in the language classroom that can assist practicing teachers in making informed decisions as to the best approach(es) for their students. The activities presented in this chapter represent a variety of research-based approaches to teaching grammar that involve students actively in the learning process. By integrating these strategies into the language classroom, a more balanced and effective approach to grammar teaching will emerge that is in concert with prevailing research based language teaching theory and approaches.

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